



**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER**

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September 14, 2009

TO: Supervisor Don Knabe, Chair
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM:

Wendy L. Watanabe
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **FAMILIESFIRST (FORMERLY HOLLYGROVE/EMQ) FOSTER FAMILY
AGENCY CONTRACT REVIEW – A DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN
AND FAMILY SERVICES PROVIDER**

We have completed a contract compliance review of FamiliesFirst (formerly Hollygrove/EMQ) Foster Family Agency (FamiliesFirst or Agency), a Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) provider.

Background

DCFS contracts with FamiliesFirst, a private non-profit community-based organization to recruit, train and certify foster care parents for the supervision of children DCFS places in foster care. Once the Agency places a child, it is required to monitor the placement until the child is discharged from the program.

FamiliesFirst is required to hire qualified social workers to provide case management and act as a liaison between DCFS and foster parents. The Agency oversees a total of 19 certified foster homes in which 22 DCFS children were placed at the time of our review. FamiliesFirst is located in the Third District.

DCFS pays FamiliesFirst a negotiated monthly rate, per child placement, established by the California Department of Social Services' (CDSS) Foster Care Rates Bureau. Based on the child's age, FamiliesFirst receives between \$1,589 and \$1,865 per month, per child. Out of these funds, the Agency pays the foster parents between \$624 and

\$790 per month, per child. DCFS paid FamiliesFirst approximately \$396,000 during Fiscal Year 2008-09.

Purpose/Methodology

The purpose of our review was to determine whether FamiliesFirst was providing the services outlined in their Program Statement and the County contract. We reviewed certified foster parent files, children's case files, personnel files and interviewed FamiliesFirst staff. We also visited a number of certified foster homes and interviewed several children and foster parents.

Results of Review

All three homes we visited were well maintained. In addition, the foster parents indicated that the services they received from the Agency generally met their expectations and the children indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents.

FamiliesFirst needs to ensure that foster homes are in compliance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. The Agency also needs to ensure that children taking psychotropic medications have a current court authorization for the administration of the medication. In addition, FamiliesFirst needs to ensure that Needs and Services Plans (NSPs), Quarterly Reports and case files contain all the required information. Further, the Agency has not corrected four of the findings reported during our prior monitoring report. We specifically noted the following:

- Two of the three foster homes visited did not conduct and document disaster drills with the children at the time of placement and every six months thereafter as required.
- One of the three foster homes visited did not have an adequate means of escape from the second story of the home in case of emergency. Our prior review also noted that FamiliesFirst did not always ensure that foster homes had an adequate means of escape from the second story of the home in case of emergency.
- One of the three foster homes visited was not assessed by FamiliesFirst to determine the foster parents' ability to effectively care for more than two children prior to placing more than two children in the home. At the time of our review, four children were placed in the home.
- Two of the three children taking psychotropic medications did not have a current court authorization for the administration of the medication. Subsequent to our review, the Agency obtained current court authorizations for the two children.

- None of the NSPs reviewed contained goals that were specific, measurable and time-limited. Our prior review also noted that FamiliesFirst did not always ensure that NSPs contained goals that were specific, measurable and time-limited.
- Two of the three NSPs reviewed were not approved by the DCFS social workers as required. Our prior review also noted that FamiliesFirst did not always ensure that NSPs were approved by the DCFS social workers.
- Two of the three NSPs reviewed did not contain a discussion of the need for modifications in services or the Agency's recommendation regarding the feasibility of the child's return to home, placement in another facility or a move to independent living.
- Two of the three case files reviewed did not contain documentation that the DCFS social workers were updated monthly regarding the children's progress.
- One of the Quarterly Reports reviewed did not include a copy of the child's Emancipation Preparation Contract as required for children 14 years of age and older. At the time of our review, two children reviewed were 14 years old or over.
- One of the three Quarterly Reports reviewed was not signed by the Agency's social worker as required.
- Two of the three Quarterly Reports reviewed did not contain the date they were sent to the DCFS social worker. As a result, we could not determine if they had been sent to the DCFS social worker timely. Our prior review also noted that FamiliesFirst did not always ensure that Quarterly Reports contained all the required information and that they were submitted to the DCFS social worker within the required timeframes.
- One of the four certified foster parent files reviewed did not have a precertification tuberculosis test completed within the required timeframes. The County contract requires foster parents to have a tuberculosis test not more than one year prior to or seven days after certification. This foster parent's most recent tuberculosis test was conducted 34 months prior to certification.
- None of the four certified foster parent files reviewed contained documentation of current auto insurance. Subsequent to our review, the Agency provided the required documentation.

The details of our review along with recommendations for corrective action are attached.

Review of Report

We discussed our report with FamiliesFirst on July 24, 2009. In their attached response, FamiliesFirst indicates the actions the Agency has taken to implement the recommendations (see Attachment I). We also notified DCFS of the results of our review. In their response (see Attachment II), DCFS indicates they will follow up on our recommendations during their next monitoring review tentatively scheduled for February 2010.

We thank FamiliesFirst for their cooperation and assistance during this review. Please call me if you have any questions or your staff may contact Don Chadwick at (213) 253-0301.

WLW:MMO:JET:DC:AA

Attachments

- c: William T Fujioka, Chief Executive Officer
- Patricia S. Ploehn, Director, Department of Children and Family Services
- Ted Myers, Chief Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
- Susan Kerr, Senior Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
- Roger Barney, Chair, Board of Directors, FamiliesFirst FFA
- Peggy Gregg, Executive Director, FamiliesFirst FFA
- Jean Chen, Community Care Licensing
- Public Information Office
- Audit Committee

**FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM
FAMILIESFIRST FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY
FISCAL YEAR 2008-09**

BILLED SERVICES

Objective

Determine whether FamiliesFirst Foster Family Agency (FamiliesFirst or Agency) provided program services in accordance with their County contract and California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We visited three of the 19 Los Angeles County certified foster homes that FamiliesFirst billed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in October and November 2008, and interviewed three foster parents and three children placed in the three homes. We also reviewed the case files for four foster parents and three children and we reviewed the Agency's monitoring activity.

Results

All three homes we visited were well maintained. In addition, the foster parents indicated that the services they received from the Agency generally met their expectations and the children indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents.

FamiliesFirst needs to ensure that foster homes are in compliance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. The Agency also needs to ensure that children taking psychotropic medications have a current court authorization for the administration of the medication. In addition, FamiliesFirst needs to ensure that Needs and Services Plans (NSPs), Quarterly Reports and case files contain all the required information. We specifically noted the following:

Foster Home Visitation

- Two (67%) of the three foster homes visited did not conduct and document disaster drills with the children at the time of placement and every six months thereafter as required.
- One (33%) of the three foster homes visited did not have an adequate means of escape from the second story of the home in case of emergency. Our prior review also noted that FamiliesFirst did not always ensure that foster homes had an adequate means of escape from the second story of the home in case of emergency.

- One (33%) of the three foster homes visited was not assessed by FamiliesFirst to determine the foster parents' ability to effectively care for more than two children prior to placing more than two children in the home. At the time of our review, four children were placed in the home.

Medical Services

- Two (67%) of the three children taking psychotropic medications did not have a current court authorization for the administration of the medication. Subsequent to our review, the Agency obtained current court authorizations for the two children.

Needs and Services Plans, Quarterly Reports and Children's Case Files

- None of the NSPs reviewed contained goals that were specific, measurable and time-limited. Our prior review also noted that FamiliesFirst did not always ensure that NSPs contained goals that were specific, measurable and time-limited.
- Two (67%) of the three NSPs reviewed were not approved by the DCFS social workers as required. Our prior review also noted that FamiliesFirst did not always ensure that NSPs were approved by the DCFS social workers.
- Two (67%) of the three NSPs reviewed did not contain a discussion of the need for modifications in services or the Agency's recommendation regarding the feasibility of the child's return to home, placement in another facility or a move to independent living.
- Two (67%) of the three case files reviewed did not contain documentation that the DCFS social workers were updated monthly regarding the children's progress.
- One of the Quarterly Reports reviewed did not include a copy of the child's Emancipation Preparation Contract as required for children 14 years of age and older. At the time of our review, two children reviewed were 14 years old or over.
- One (33%) of the three Quarterly Reports reviewed was not signed by the Agency's social worker as required.
- Two (67%) of the three Quarterly Reports reviewed did not contain the date they were sent to the DCFS social worker. As a result, we could not determine if they had been sent to the DCFS social worker timely. Our prior review also noted that the Agency did not always ensure that Quarterly Reports contained all the required information and that they were submitted to the DCFS social worker within the required timeframes.

Foster Parent Certification

- One (25%) of the four certified foster parent files reviewed did not have a precertification tuberculosis test completed within the required timeframes. The County contract requires foster parents to have a tuberculosis test not more than one year prior to or seven days after certification. This foster parent's most recent tuberculosis test was conducted 34 months prior to certification.
- None of the four certified foster parent files reviewed contained documentation of current auto insurance. Subsequent to our review, the Agency provided the required documentation.

Recommendations

FamiliesFirst management ensure:

1. **Staff adequately monitor foster homes to ensure they comply with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.**
2. **Foster parents conduct and document disaster drills with the children at the time of new placement and every six months thereafter.**
3. **Foster homes have an adequate means of escape from the second story of the home in case of emergency.**
4. **Foster home assessments are completed for homes where more than two children are placed.**
5. **Children taking psychotropic medication have current court authorizations for the administration of the medication.**
6. **NSPs contain goals that are specific, measurable and time-limited.**
7. **NSPs are approved by the DCFS social workers.**
8. **NSPs contain all required information including a discussion of the need for modifications in services and the Agency's recommendation regarding the feasibility of the child's return to home, placement in another facility or a move to independent living.**
9. **DCFS social workers are updated monthly regarding the children's progress.**
10. **Quarterly Reports include an Emancipation Preparation Contract for children who are 14 years of age and older.**

11. Quarterly reports are signed and dated by the Agency's social worker.
12. Foster Parent precertification tuberculosis tests are conducted within the required timeframes.
13. Foster parent certification files contain all the required information including documentation of current automobile insurance.

CLIENT VERIFICATION

Objective

Determine whether the program participants received the services that FamiliesFirst billed to DCFS.

Verification

We interviewed three children placed in three FamiliesFirst certified foster homes and three foster parents to confirm the services the Agency billed to DCFS.

Results

The foster children interviewed stated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents and the foster parents interviewed stated that the services they received from the Agency generally met their expectations.

Recommendation

None.

STAFFING/CASELOAD LEVELS

Objective

Determine whether FamiliesFirst social workers' caseloads do not exceed 15 placements and whether the supervising social worker does not supervise more than six social workers, as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We interviewed FamiliesFirst administrator and supervising social worker and reviewed caseload statistics and payroll records for the Agency's social workers and supervising social worker.

Results

FamiliesFirst's three social workers carried an average caseload of seven cases and the Agency's supervising social worker supervised three social workers.

Recommendation

None.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS**Objective**

Determine whether FamiliesFirst staff possess the education and work experience qualifications required by their County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, determine whether the Agency conducted hiring clearances prior to hiring their staff and provided ongoing training to staff.

Verification

We interviewed FamiliesFirst administrator and reviewed each staff's personnel file for documentation to confirm their education and work experience qualifications, hiring clearances and ongoing training.

Results

FamiliesFirst's supervising social worker and social workers possessed the education and work experience required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, FamiliesFirst conducted hiring clearances and provided ongoing training for staff working on the County contract.

Recommendation

None.

PRIOR YEAR FOLLOW-UP**Objective**

Determine the status of the recommendations reported in the Auditor-Controller's prior monitoring review.

Verification

We verified whether the outstanding recommendations from the Fiscal Year 2005-06 monitoring reviews were implemented. We issued a report for FamiliesFirst (formerly Hollygrove/EMQ) on September 18, 2006.

Results

The prior monitoring reports contained seven outstanding recommendations. FamiliesFirst fully implemented three of the recommendations. As indicated earlier, the findings relating to recommendations 2, 6, 8, and 9 contained in this report were also noted during the prior monitoring review.

Recommendation

- 14. FamiliesFirst management implement the four outstanding recommendations from the Fiscal Year 2005-06 monitoring report.**



FamiliesFirst

815 N El Centro Ave.
Los Angeles, Ca 90038

July 31, 2009

To: Supervisor Don Knabe, Chair
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: James McEwen, Clinical Program Manager Foster Care and Adoption Services

Subject: FamiliesFirst (Formally Hollygrove/EMQ) Foster Family Agency Contract review- a department of children and families services service provider.

The Foster Family Agency formally known as Hollygrove/EMQ merged into FamiliesFirst Foster Care and Adoption Services on January 1, 2009. The transition to FamiliesFirst has resulted in an increased attention to the quality service delivery with particular attention to treatment planning, and contract and statutory compliance, including documentation in the Los Angeles based office. FamiliesFirst has been a foster care and adoptions provider in Northern and Central California for over the past twenty-one years and is accredited by the Council on Accreditation (COA) for meeting their standards and practices. The following is the FamiliesFirst response to each of the recommendation outlined in the Auditor-Controller's review conducted in October 2008 and November 2008.

Recommendations:

1. *Staff adequately monitor foster homes to insure they comply with the County contract and DCSS title 22 regulations.*

FamiliesFirst Response:

The quarterly review of the foster child rights, care and supervision, physical plant requirements, food service, recertification checklist (auto insurance, current DMV, First Aid/CPR, current pet vaccination), a walk through of the home, and all annual documentation to be reviewed with the family at recertification. Proper use of this document will ensure that foster homes are in compliance with the County contract and DCSS title 22 regulations.

2. *Foster Parents conduct and document disaster drills with the children at the time of new placement and every six months.*

FamiliesFirst Response:

Foster families will conduct and document disaster drills with children at the time of placement and every six months. These drills will be documented by the social worker on the Foster Care Evaluation form as part of the social worker's quarterly review of the home.

3. *Foster homes have an adequate means of escape from the second story of the home in case of emergency.*

FamiliesFirst Response:

FamiliesFirst will ensure that all homes with second stories have a means of escape in the event of an emergency. The safety features of each home will be reviewed during quarterly reviews of safety equipment on the "Foster Care Evaluation" form.

4. *Foster home assessments are completed for homes where more than two children are placed.*

FamiliesFirst Response:

FamiliesFirst will conduct an assessment of the foster home before placing more than two children. The completion of the "Additional/New Placement Family Review" form assess the family's ability to adequately meet the needs of the every child currently placed in the home as well as the family's ability to meet the needs of any additional children. The agency also follows the COA standards for determining the number of possible placements based on the number of adults in a foster home.

5. *Children taking psychotropic medication have current court authorization for administration of the medication.*

FamiliesFirst Response:

FamiliesFirst will obtain court authorization, the JV220, for psychotropic medication upon placement of a child and will obtain the renewed authorization every six months to ensure on going compliance.

6. *NSPs contain goals that are specific, measurable, and time limited.*

FamiliesFirst Response:

FamiliesFirst social workers will review each child's individual need and document those needs on the NSP in a goal format that is specific to the child, has a measurable objective, defines the methods applied to achieve the goal, and is time limited. These goals will cover a variety of domains relevant to the unique needs of the child, including social, academic, and health to name a few.

7. *NSPs are approved by the DCFS social workers.*

FamiliesFirst Response:

FamiliesFirst will fax the child's social worker a copy of the NSP to obtain their signature each quarter. The agency will make three attempts to obtain the signature of the social worker and document each attempt on the signature page of the NSP. These three attempts will be made within two weeks of the due date of the NSP.

8. *NSPs contain all required information including a discussion of the needs for modification in services and the Agency's recommendation regarding the feasibility of the child's return to home, placement with another facility or a move to independent living.*

FamiliesFirst Response:

FamiliesFirst social workers will gather information from all sources involved in the care of the child to make an informed recommendation on child's permanent plan, whether it is reunification with family or relative care, placement in another facility or the transition into independent living. The social worker will ensure that each child's NSP contains all required information including a discussion regarding the modification of services provided to each child.

9. *DCFS social workers are updated monthly regarding the children's progress.*

FamiliesFirst Response:

FamiliesFirst social workers will ensure that all county social workers are contacted by phone with a case update ix/month. The contact with DCFS will be documented in the child's clinical record. If the FFA is unable to contact and speak directly with the DCFS social worker, the attempts will be documented in the clinical record.

10. *Quarterly reports include an Emancipation Preparation Contract for children who are 14 years of age and older.*

FamiliesFirst Response:

The Emancipation Preparation Contract for all children 14 years old and older will be included in the quarterly report. Efforts to obtain an updated EPC from the DCSF social worker will make prior to the end of each quarter so that it can be included in the quarterly report. These efforts will be documented in the clinical record.

- 11. Quarterly reports are signed and dated by the Agency's social worker.*

FamiliesFirst Response:

FamiliesFirst social workers will sign and date the quarterly report upon completion of the NSP and prior to obtaining signatures from the child, foster parent and DCFS social worker. The social worker's supervisor will review the quarterly and sign the NSP to ensure that the child's psycho-social needs are being addressed through the treatment plan and that all signatures are obtained.

- 12. Foster Parent pre-certification tuberculosis tests are conducted within the requested timeframes.*

FamiliesFirst Response:

FamiliesFirst will ensure that foster parent tuberculosis tests are completed within the allotted time frames to be compliant with Title 22 requirements and our policies. Results of the TB tests are maintained in the foster family file as well as documented in the home study.

- 13. Foster parent certification files contain all the required information including documentation of current automobile insurance.*

FamiliesFirst Response:

FamiliesFirst will ensure that all relevant documentation for certification is filed in the foster family file. The expiration date of all documents is reviewed by the social worker with each family during their quarterly review and documented on the Foster Care Evaluation form. The use of this form provides a tracking of expiration dates and a system for collecting documents prior to expiration.

- 14. FamiliesFirst management implement the four outstanding recommendations for the fiscal year 2005-06 monitoring report.*

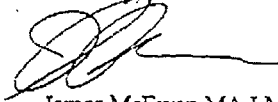
FamiliesFirst Response:

FamiliesFirst is addressing the fiscal year 2005-06 monitoring report for outstanding recommendations 2, 6, 8, and 9 for Hollygrove/EMQ in this current report.

The FamiliesFirst team appreciates this opportunity to respond to the compliance review and demonstrate our dedication to improving the services provided to children and families.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at (323) 769-7129.

Sincerely,



James McEwen MA LMFT
Clinical Program Manager
Foster Care and Adoption Services



PATRICIA S. PLOEHN, LCSW
Director


**County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

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August 6, 2009

Board of Supervisors
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MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH
Fifth District

TO: Aggie Alonso, Chief Accountant-Auditor
Countywide Contract Monitoring Division

FROM:  Elizabeth A. Howard, Section Head
Out of Home Care Management Division
Foster Family Agency/Group Home Performance Management

**DCFS RESPONSE TO THE AUDITOR CONTROLLER'S CONTRACT REVIEW OF
FAMILIES FIRST (FORMERLY HOLLYGROVE/EMQ) FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY**

The Out of Home Care Management Division (OHCMD) has reviewed the Auditor-Controller's (A-C) August 3, 2009 final draft report of the contract compliance review of Families First Foster Family Agency. Although the report notes several programmatic issues, there were no safety issues which require an immediate response from DCFS.

We will conduct a follow-up review based on the A-C's recommendations, which is tentatively scheduled for February, 2010.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (626) 569-6804.

MG:EAH:EK

c: Wendy L. Watanabe, Auditor-Controller
Patricia Ploehn, Director, DCFS
Lisa Perrish, Deputy Director, DCFS
Marilynne Garrison, Division Chief, DCFS